

## The Sharp, Shiny Leaf

So there I was, right? I got the framework laid and most of the side strands up, I'm about 80% of the way through the thing and I'm trying to get it finished 'cause I know it's almost night and dinner'll be coming by pretty soon. I was building in this holly bush 'cuz the stickers keep most of the birds out so I don't gotta worry 'bout them but the shiny leaves attract flies, which is good news for yours truly.

Anyway, like I said, I'm almost done with the web and I feel the web jiggle. That's good 'cuz it might be the dinner bell – maybe a nice, juicy moth – and so I hustle my abdomen in that direction, right? But it ain't no moth; it's another bozo spider in my crib. At first I wasn't sure that's what it was, okay, 'cuz it didn't look like no spider I ever seen before. He looked all wrong. But hey, it's my web and he don't belong there, so I'm gonna toss him out. But when I get closer I get a better look, and he's got something covering him up. You know them really, really big two-legged things you see walkin' around – the ones that like to wreck my webs? – he had stuff draped over him like they do, like a fly all wrapped up in silk. He was wearing this eight-legged robe kinda thing, with a hood pulled up over his head, and he had some goofy stick-lookin' gadget over his shoulder – a stick with what looked like a long, sharp, shiny leaf attached to one end of it. I don't know what his action is, right, but he's in my grill so he's leaving just as soon as I get around to it.

I shag it over to the bozo, right, and tell him, “Yo, Skank – nobody invited you, man, so ya wanna drag your ugly self outta my web? Or do I gotta start kickin’ your spinnerets up around your mandibles?” Well, the dude just kinda looks at me, real cold, right, like he’s jus’ darin’ me to start somethin’. Hey, I’m the obligin’ kinda guy, y’know, so I step closer and start clickin’ my jaws to tell him I mean business. But the bozo don’t even flinch. He just stares at me, all blank-eyed, and says to me “I am Death.”

Now my mama was a good lady. She taught me and all 500 of my brothers and sisters not to make fun’a nobody ‘cuza stuff they couldn’t help, right? So I normally wouldn’t hassle a guy about having a stupid name like Death, but this putz is in my crib, and a guy’s gotta defend his rep, right? So I grab the web and give it a shake, letting him know I’m in charge around here, and growl, “Say what? ‘Death’? What kinda name is that for a spider!”

Now the bozo kinda tilts his head, lookin’ at me like he don’t know what to make of me. Guess he wasn’t used to nobody tellin’ him off. “I am Death, the Grim Reaper,” he growls at me.

This time I can’t help myself; I laughed out loud at the guy. What a stupid name! Gimme a friggin’ break – ‘Deaththegrimreaper,’ yet! What a schmuck! I ain’t never heard such a stupid name in my life! “Yo, Deaththegrimreaper,” I said, trying to stop laughing at his dopey self, “I told you, you’re in my crib. I got a meal to catch and

you're making a pest of your ugly self. You do not want to mess with me, dude – I know bugrate!” (Actually, I don't know bugrate but he don't gotta know that, and I've seen enough Bruce Flea movies that I can fake it pretty good.) “Now get outta here, already,” I tell him.

“I have come to take you,” he says.

“Hey,” I tell him, “this eensy-weensy spider don't swing that way. You ain't takin' nobody nowhere, Junior. Now I'm tellin' you for the last time, get your silkmakers out of my web or I'm gonna tear you limb from limb from limb!” Next thing I know, this Deaththegrimreaper putz gets radical; he pulls a weapon on me! Yeah! yanks that stick off his shoulder and swings it at me. But I ain't no wuss, y'know. Man, I used to have a web in the baddest part of town – right under this robin's nest in a tree in the heart of Central Park! So I'm ready for him to get nasty. I told ya I had a good grip on the web? Well, I yank myself down on the silk, real hard, and then make like I'm trying to jump as high as I can – while holding on, y'know? I shake that web jus' as hard as I could, and this Deaththegrimreaper dork loses his grip on the stick. He drops it and falls through the net. I watched him fallin', but then he just wasn't there no more...like he just disappeared or somethin'.

“There ya go, skank!” I hollared down at him – well, where he shoulda been, anyway. “Next time don't dis Kiann if ya know what's good for ya!” Well, I picked up that goony stick-thing and took a good look at it. That leaf on the end? It was more like

a thorn than a leaf – hard and sharp – good thing he didn’t hit me with it; that thing’d cut ya long, deep, and wide! I got to thinkin’ maybe it’d be good to have – just in case, y’know? So I carried it over to my den and put it away.

That stick came in pretty handy, too, lemme tell ya. I found out it’s a better friend than I thought it’d be. Like the time that big wasp came buzzin’ around lookin’ for a fresh spider sandwich with me as the lunch meat – he chased me around the web and I ducked into my lair and stumbled right over that stick. I grabbed it and held tight, but before I could use it he’s on top of me, stickin’ and stabbin’ and stingin’ me – but ya know the weird thing? I didn’t feel it, and it just didn’t work – like I was Superbug or somethin’ – I didn’t die! Then I got turned over and brought that stick up and smacked him with it. Instantly, the wasp collapsed on me, dead as a rock. I also found out that if some too-big bug, like a grasshopper or cicada, got in my web I could hit them with the stick and they’d just croak before they could tear the silk. That was great! Man, a big catch like that could feed a guy like me for a week. ‘Course, with them dead instead of just stunned they got gamey pretty quick, y’know, so that wasn’t so good, but even so, ya take the good with the bad, right?

So, time passed. The days started getting shorter and cooler, and pretty soon food started getting a little scarce. Time for all us good little spiders to get hidden for the winter. But I just didn’t feel like hibernatin’ for some reason. Just never got tired and winter-sleepy. I thought I’d starve over the winter, what with no chow deliveries in my

immediate future. But that didn't happen either. I just stopped bein' hungry. Maybe it had to do with that stick or somethin'...

Anyway, that's my story. I ain't had a real bad day since I showed ol' Deaththegrimreaper where to get off. I killed a jay that was planning on turning me into bird poop, again with that goofy stick-thing – been through about – lessee, now...I've counted each leg and each eye twice, one for each summer...that makes 32 years, I think – met my share of sweet young ladyspiders and made a whole buncha kids, ate a friggin' ton a bugs, and spun about a hundred miles a silk line. It's been a good life, real good.

Hey, it's getting' late. I got a date with this cutie in about an hour – man, she's got legs that just will not quit, ya know what I mean? All eight of 'em!

END

Stephen Thorn

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